

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Bull Trout Draft Recovery Plan and proposed Critical Habitat

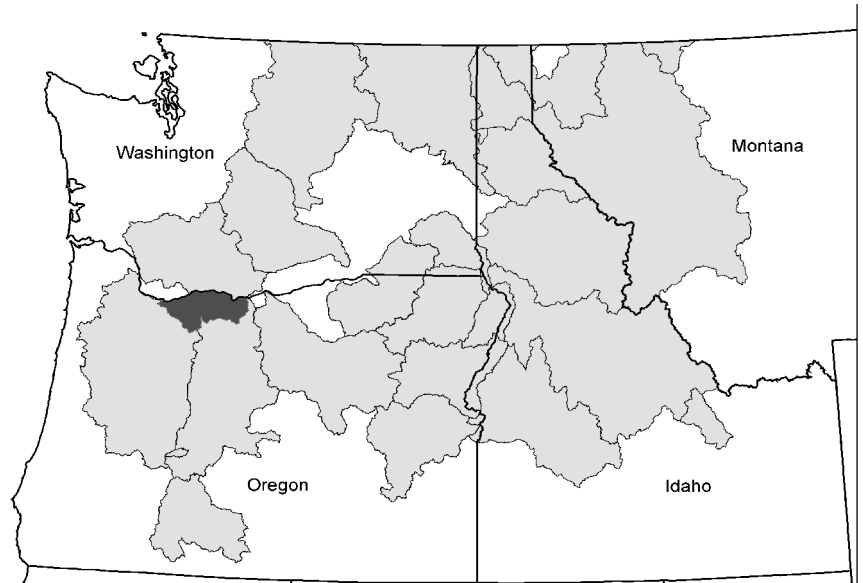
Hood River Recovery Unit (CHAPTER 6)

What areas are included in the Hood River Basin Recovery Unit?

The Hood River Recovery Unit includes the Hood and Sandy river basins, which are located wholly in northern Oregon. The Hood River Recovery Unit Team identified one core area containing two bull trout populations (known as the Clear Branch and Hood River local populations) that will be the center of recovery efforts. The Clear Branch local population is contained in Clear Branch, Laurance Lake and Pinnacle Creek. The Hood River population is contained in Bear Creek, Coe Branch, Compass Creek, Eliot Branch Tony Creek and the mainstem of Hood River. The Sandy River contains core area habitat but additional research on whether bull trout regularly use that river is needed.

How much of the area is proposed as critical habitat?

The Hood River critical habitat unit includes the mainstem



Hood River and three of its major tributaries, Clear Branch Hood, West Fork Hood and East Fork Hood rivers totaling about 110 miles of stream habitat and 91 acres of reservoir surface area. Proposed critical habitat in this unit encompasses five percent of the recovery unit.

Who developed the draft recovery plan and critical habitat proposal?

The draft recovery plan for bull trout was developed through the collaboration of federal, state, tribal and private biologists working with representatives of local watersheds, private landowners and industry and conservation

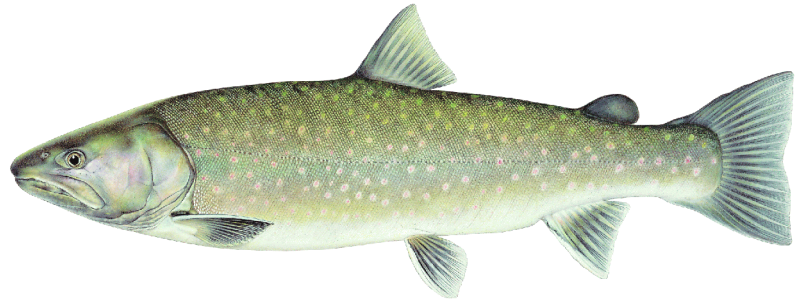
organizations. A total of 24 local recovery unit teams contributed to the development of the draft recovery plans for each of the recovery units. These recovery unit teams included experts in biology, hydrology and forestry, as well as natural resource users and stakeholders with interest and knowledge of bull trout and the habitats they depend on for survival. The critical habitat proposal was based in large part on information developed by the recovery unit teams and supplemented with even more recent information on the current distribution and habitat characteristics of the species.

What is the relationship between the draft recovery plan and the critical habitat proposal?

The draft recovery plan and critical habitat proposal are closely linked. The information developed by the recovery unit teams, and the science underlying that information, are the basis for the critical habitat proposals. However, critical habitat is designed to provide for the conservation of a species by identifying those areas essential for conservation and requiring special management, whereas a recovery plan is a much larger blueprint providing guidance for the eventual recovery and de-listing of a species.

Who would be affected by recovery efforts and a critical habitat designation?

A recovery plan is advisory only and carries no regulatory authority. It is the Fish and Wildlife Service's estimation of the actions necessary for the recovery of the species. Agencies, communities or individuals are encouraged to take voluntary actions described in the recovery plan to benefit bull trout. Federal agencies are required to consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service on actions they carry out, fund, or authorize that might affect critical habitat. It is important to note that in most cases, this is already occurring under the section 7 interagency



consultation requirements of the Endangered Species Act. Non-federal entities, including private landowners, that may also be affected could include, for example, those seeking a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 404 permit under the Clean Water Act to build an in-water structure, those seeking federal approval to discharge effluent into the aquatic environment, or those seeking federal funding to implement private property improvements, where such actions affect the aquatic environment that has been designated as critical habitat. But again, in most cases where this link between activities on private lands and Federal funding, permitting, or authorization exists, consultation under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act is already occurring.

A critical habitat designation does not have any effect on non-federal entities when there is not a federal nexus. For example, swimming, boating, fishing, farming, ranching, or any of a range of activities normally conducted by a

landowner or operator of a business not involving federal funding, permitting, or authorization in order to occur would not be affected.

How was the draft recovery plan for each unit developed?

Recovery units were delineated based on the biology of the species and considerations for paralleling existing state conservation and fisheries management frameworks wherever possible. Recovery teams incorporated existing state conservation processes to the degree possible, depending on the degree to which they had been developed (for example, the Montana Bull Trout Restoration Plan, the State of Idaho's Bull Trout Conservation Plan, the State of Washington's Statewide Strategy to Recover Salmon and the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds).

What is the status of bull trout in the Hood River Basin Unit?

A comprehensive population assessment on bull trout in the Hood River Basin Recovery Unit is not available, but biologists estimate there are fewer than 300 adult bull trout in the Hood River Basin. Currently bull trout are known to occur in five major areas within the recovery unit: Hood River mainstem, East Fork Hood, West Fork Hood, Middle Fork Hood, and Clear Branch rivers. There have been three bull trout observations in the Sandy River.

What are the threats to bull trout in the Hood River Recovery Unit?

Bull trout in the Hood River Recovery Unit are threatened primarily by isolation and habitat fragmentation from dams. Other threats to bull trout in this recovery unit include seasonally impaired water

flows and quality due to irrigation practices, impacts from non-native fish, altered channel and stream habitat conditions from agricultural practices, roads, and forest management practices.

What are the recovery goals and objectives?

The goal of the bull trout recovery plan is to ensure the long-term persistence of self-sustaining, complex interacting groups of bull trout distributed across the species' range so that the species can be de-listed. To recover bull trout in the Hood River Recovery Unit, the following objectives have been identified:

- * Maintain the current bull trout distribution within the core area and re-establish bull trout in previously occupied areas within the Hood River Recovery Unit.
- * Maintain stable or increasing trends in abundance of bull trout within the Hood River Recovery Unit.
- * Restore and maintain

suitable habitat conditions for all bull trout life stages and strategies.

- * Conserve bull trout genetic diversity and provide opportunity for genetic exchange.

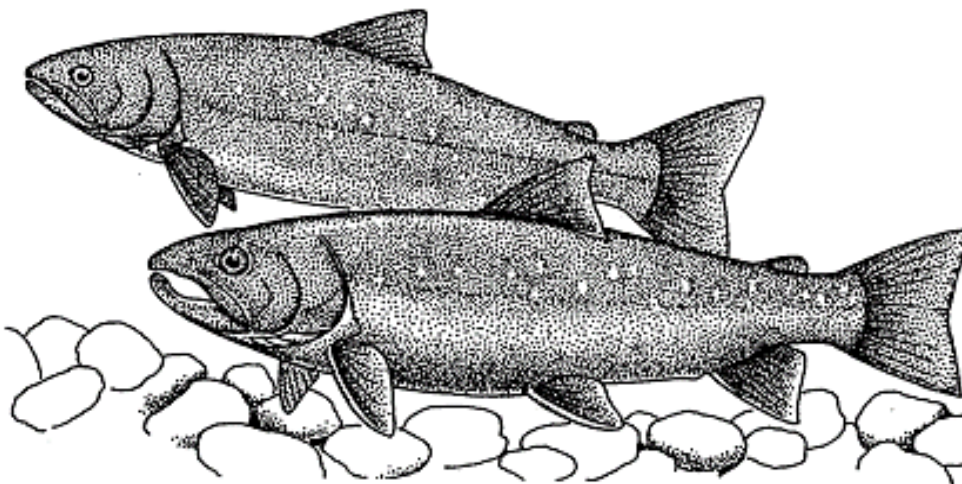
What are the criteria for measuring recovery?

Recovery will be measured according to four criteria: distribution, abundance, population trends and connectivity in the Hood River Recovery Unit. The recovery plan includes specific, quantifiable standards for each of these criteria.

Distribution criteria will be met when bull trout are distributed among three or more local populations, including the existing Clear Branch and Hood River local populations in the Hood River Core Area.

Abundance criteria will be met when the estimated abundance of adult bull trout is at least 500 individuals distributed within the Hood River Recovery Unit.

Trend criteria will be met when adult bull trout exhibit a stable or increasing trend for at least two generations at or above the recovered abundance level within the recovery unit.



Connectivity criteria will be met when passage barriers to bull trout have been addressed at Powerdale Dam, Clear Branch Dam, Coe Diversion, Eliot Diversion, Farmers Diversion and Tony Creek Diversion, and when seasonal water quality barriers have been addressed in the East and West Forks of Hood River.

What actions will be necessary to recover bull trout in the Hood River Basin Recovery Unit?

The following general actions as essential to the recovery of bull trout in this unit; protect, restore and maintain suitable habitat conditions for bull trout; improve passage; prevent and reduce negative effects of non-native fishes on bull trout; and establish fisheries management goals and objectives compatible with bull trout recovery. A complete description of actions are available in the draft Bull Trout Recovery Plan, Hood River Recovery Unit, Ch 6.

How long will recovery take?

A recovery plan is advisory only and carries no regulatory authority; therefore it is difficult to determine how long it will take to recover bull trout in the Hood River Basin Recovery Unit. However, given our best estimate of what government agencies and others might do, it could take three to five bull trout generations, or 15 to 25 years, before identified

threats to the species can be significantly reduced and bull trout can be considered eligible for delisting.

How much will recovery cost?

Estimating the cost of recovery is difficult and complex, due to many variables and unknowns. However, the Hood River Recovery Unit team has estimated that recovery could cost about \$16 million spread over 25 years. This includes estimates of expenditures by local, Tribal, State and Federal governments and by private business and individuals. The estimates are attributed to bull trout conservation but other aquatic species also will benefit. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is soliciting comments from the public on the estimated costs.

How can I obtain copies of the documents?

The documents, along with maps, fact sheets, photographs and other materials may be found on the Pacific Region's website at <http://species.fws.gov/bulltrout>.

How can I comment?

The Service will be accepting comments, beginning November 29, 2002, on its draft recovery plan for bull trout in the Columbia and Klamath river basins and in the St. Mary-Belly River Basin in Montana. Comments on the draft recovery plan will be

accepted for 90 days, until February 27, 2003.

Comments on the draft recovery plan may be mailed to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Snake River Basin Office, 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Room 368, Boise, ID 83709; faxed to 208-378-5262, or sent via e-mail to: fw1srbocomment@fws.gov

Beginning November 29, 2002, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will accept comments from the public on the agency's proposal to designate critical habitat for the Columbia River and Klamath River distinct population segments of bull trout. Comments will be accepted for 60 days, until January 28, 2003.

Comments on the critical habitat proposal may be submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Regional Office, attn: John Young, Bull Trout Coordinator, 911 N.E. 11th Avenue, Portland Oregon 97232; faxed to 503.231.6243 or e-mailed to: R1bulltroutCH@r1.fws.gov

This is only a brief summary.

Please see full draft recovery plan and critical habitat proposal for complete details.